**Concern about technology use as kids head back to school - Some parents say kids are too connected and suggest ways to maintain a healthy balance**

David Thurton [CBC News](http://www.cbc.ca/news/credit.html) Posted: Sep 2, 2012 5:35 AM ET

As students head back to school with the latest tablets, laptops and smartphones in their knapsacks, some parents worry the abundance of gadgets in their children's lives could be affecting their grades and health.

"I think there is a limitation that needs to be put on technology because you can get so far pulled into this vortex," said Samantha Kemp-Jackson, "Are we raising a whole generation of anxious wired people because of the draw that it has?"

Kemp-Jackson, a Toronto-based parenting advisor and author of MultipleMayhemMamma.com, said that even she needs to take her own advice, admitting her twin sons and daughter are sometimes too connected.

"My two three-year-olds, they play on the computer. They play games on the iPad. They know how to use a smartphone," Kemp-Jackson said. "It's actually kind of disturbing. My eight-year-old daughter goes to her grandparents' house and shows my parents how to use the computer."

Research data suggests the more non-classwork time students spend on computers and online, the more likely it is their grades could suffer.

A 2006 Winona-State University study, for example, surveyed 137 students in a general psychology class and found that laptops, a useful tool, were also the greatest source of distraction during lectures.

A 2010 joint study by Ohio State University and Open University of the Netherlands surveyed 219 students and found a relationship between Facebook use and negative academic performance. It found Facebook users had GPAs in the 3.0 to 3.5 range and studied one to five hours a week; non Facebook users had GPAs in the 3.5 to 4.0 range and studied 11 to 15 hours a week.

**Health concerns**

Screen time can also contribute to obesity, which can have an impact on health and grades.

say.(Christopher Berkey/Associated Press)

According to the Active Healthy Kids Canada 2012 report card, 10- to 16-year-olds get an average of 6 hours and 37 minutes of daily non-classwork screen time. Only 19 per cent of this age group met the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology's sedentary behaviour guideline of no more than two hours of recreational screen time per day.

Another study released in June 2012 in the journal *Child Development* followed 6,250 children from kindergarten through fifth grade and found that those who were obese scored lower on math tests than non-obese children.

"Our study suggests that childhood obesity, especially obesity that persists throughout the elementary grades, can harm children's social and emotional well-being and academic performance," the study's lead author, Sara Gable, an associate professor of nutrition and exercise physiology at the University of Missouri-Columbia, said in a release.

**Set goals and boundaries**

To offset the effects of screen time, Benjamin de Graaf advises the fathers he works with to get their kids involved in activities where they can socialize and at the same time be physically active.

De Graaf is the father of a 13 year-old son himself and also the operations manager for Young and Potential Fathers, a community-based organization in Toronto that provides parenting workshops for Black fathers.

"One thing I am doing with my son is I bring him to the YMCA," de Graaf said, "I want him to get acclimated and understand that on Saturday mornings, on weekends, we are going to go to the gym and this is what we are going to do."

To help kids achieve a healthy academic balance, parents and children also need to set goals at the beginning of the academic year and determine homework times, de Graaf said. He believes parents should also do what he calls "modeling behaviour," where children get some sort of reward for completing homework or chores.

"It could be set times that are given. Like, as soon as they come home we get the homework done right away, and then after the homework is done then they will have a little bit of time to get on the internet or play with a device," said de Graaf.

One of the things that de Graaf teaches in his workshops with new fathers is that while it's important to set goals and parameters, it’s even more important to develop a routine.

"I tell the men here direction without follow-up is useless. Your child won't understand that you are serious about what you said if you don't follow up and enforce it," de Graaf said, "For example if it's, 'Do your home work after school' for two nights of the week, and the next two or three it's 'Do whatever you want,' you are setting yourself up to fail."

**Every child is different**

Boundaries should be tailored to the individual child, Kemp-Jackson said. Parents need to consider a range of factors, such as the age of their kids and what they think is unacceptable when it comes to using computers, tablets, smartphones and video games.

"I really think it depends on the child, their maturity level and what they're using it for. You have to look at various factors when making your decisions," Kemp-Jackson said.

And before setting children up with the latest gear, parents also need to consider whether or not schools even allow students to bring certain gadgets to class.

"Some teachers are very open with having technology and they might be advocating that students have them. And other teachers might say no," said Kemp-Jackson.

University of Toronto professor Clare Brett thinks parents need to be flexible when it comes to parenting this tech generation. Brett lectures on technology-based learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and she said that parents should negotiate with their kids.

"I have two sons and I've been through this route. And I never did the 'you may not do this.'" Brett said, "I talked, but I always talked to them about what they were looking at and what they thought about it.

"Rather than putting yourself in that position where you make these absolutes, 'No you may not do this unless,' you should have a conversation. You learn something else and then you make suggestions."

The bottom line, she says, is that technology can become addictive and parents need to be vigilant.

"I think that anything that becomes so absorbing that it stops you from doing anything else is not a good thing," Brett said.

**EXERCISE:**

**What are your own thoughts regarding this issue? Be sure to include what you consider appropriate use of technology. Also include your thoughts on the role of technology in the classroom. Your response should be 3-4 paragraphs long. This will be assessed for completion only.**